MARVEL
New Universe
STAR BRAND
VS.
STAR BRAND
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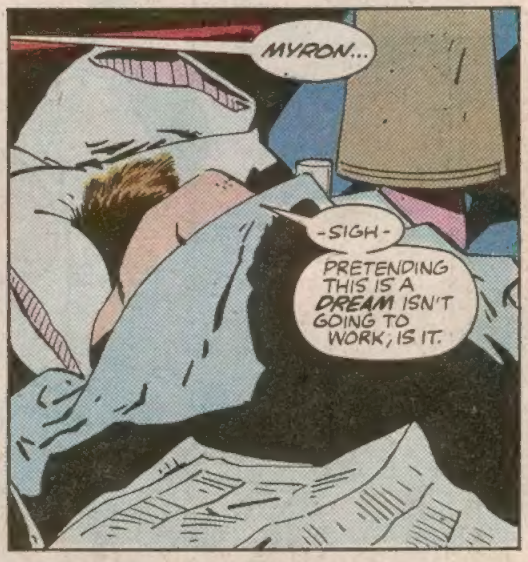
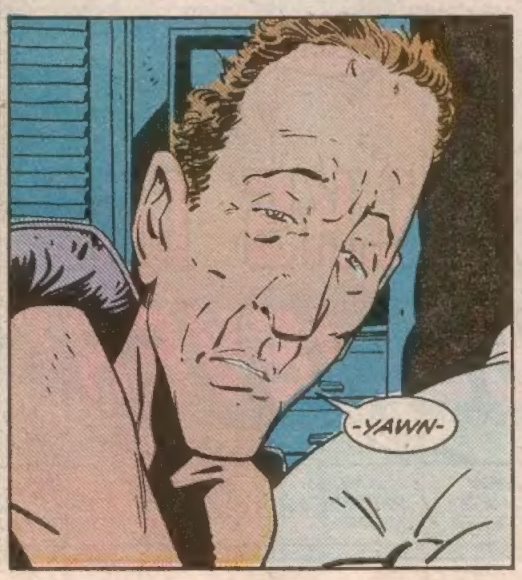
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
HIGGINS & WACEK... after Kirby...
OF COURSE IT'S A DREAM!
GUEST-STARRING
Nightmask
new universe





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I FIGURE THIS HAS TO BE A CRISIS OF LIFE OR DEATH--
SOME CATASTROPHE THAT THREATENS TO LEVEL PITTSBURGH TO THE GROUND BY MORNING, AM I RIGHT?
WHY ELSE, I'M ASKING MYSELF, WOULD KEN CONNELL BREAK INTO HIS BEST FRIEND'S HOUSE AND DISTURB HIM FROM A SOUND SLEEP AT FOUR THIRTY-SEVEN IN THE A.M.?
I NEED TO TALK TO YOU, MYRON.
I...I CAN'T SLEEP.
HE CAN'T SLEEP, HE SAYS.
OF COURSE.
THAT WOULD'VE BEEN MY SECOND GUESS.
"WHERE WALKS THE TRUE BELIEVER!"
CARY BATES WRITER
KEITH GIFFEN PENCILER
BOB WIACEK INKER
KEN LOPEZ LETTERER
ANDY YANCHUS COLORIST
MICHAEL HIGGINS EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR IN CHIEF

ALL RIGHT. -YAWN- I'M ON THE CASE. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM.
NIGHTMARES, MYRON. THEY'VE BEEN WAKING ME UP IN COLD SWEATS... NIGHT AFTER NIGHT FOR NEARLY A WEEK NOW.
WELL -YAWN- SOMETHING IS OBVIOUSLY TROUBLING YOU.
WHY DO I GET THE FEELING THE TATTOO IS A BIG PART OF THIS?

BECAUSE YOU KNOW HOW TOUGH IT'S BEEN FOR ME ALL ALONG TO LIVE WITH THE STAR BRAND'S POWER FROM DAY TO DAY.
SO NOW IT'S MESSING UP MY NIGHTS TOO. ONLY MAKES SENSE.
NOT SO FAR, MY FRIEND. START SOMEWHERE, WHY DON'T YOU.

"A FEW WEEKS BACK, A HIGH-SPEED BLOW-OUT FORCED ME TO FLY AND LAND MY BIKE DEEP IN A FOREST."
"AT THE TIME I WAS SURE I WASN'T SEEN. MAN, WAS I WRONG!"

"A TEN YEAR OLD BOY NAMED TAD APPEARED MOMENTS LATER AND INTRODUCED HIMSELF."
"IT DIDN'T TAKE HIM LONG TO LET ON HE SAW ME DO MY THING. HE SAID HE KNEW I COULD FLY."

"BUT HE DIDN'T MENTION HIS TERMINAL HEART CONDITION, OR THE CONTAMINATED WATER SUPPLY THAT HIS DOCTORS SAID HAD CAUSED SO MANY OTHER BIRTH DEFECTS IN THE AREA."
"THAT I HAD TO HEAR FROM THE POOR KID'S PARENTS."

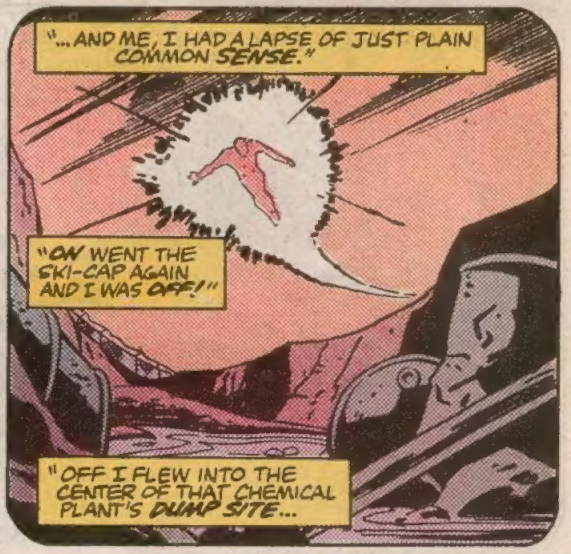
"THEY ALSO TOLD ME TAD'S BUM TICKER COULD SHUT DOWN ON HIM ANY DAY."
"SO I DUNNO, MAYBE IT WAS 'CAUSE I FELT SORRY FOR THE KID--
--BUT THE NEXT DAY I TOLD HIM, MYRON."

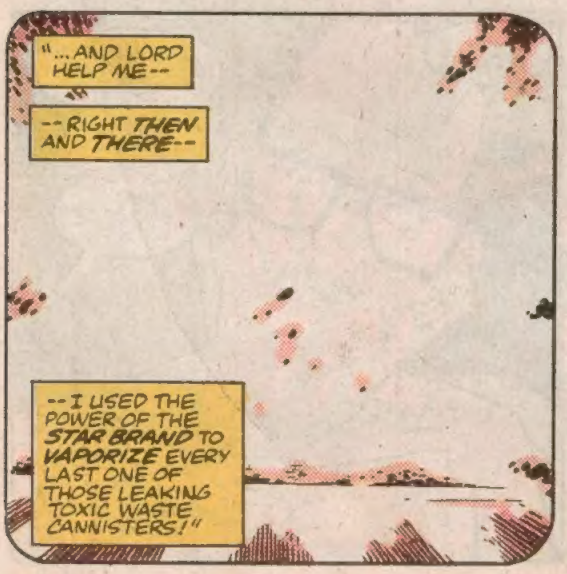
YOU DIDN'T.
I EXPLAINED ALL ABOUT THE STAR BRAND.
WHERE IT CAME FROM.
HOW I ENDED UP WITH IT.
YOU DID!??

"AND THEN I SHOWED HIM WHAT I COULD DO, MYRON. WE BOTH PULLED SKI-CAPS OVER OUR FACES AND I TOOK HIM UP!"
"THE KID GOT THE THRILL OF HIS LIFE FINDING OUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO FLY!"
"HE SAID HE FELT JUST LIKE ONE OF HIS FAVORITE COMIC BOOK HEROES..."

"...AND THAT'S WHEN ALL THE TROUBLE STARTED."
"TAD WAS SOON TRYING TO TALK ME INTO USING THE STAR BRAND ON THE TOXIC WASTE SITE."
"SO I TRIED TO EXPLAIN ALL THE REASONS I COULDN'T RISK LETTING THE WORLD FIND OUT ABOUT MY POWER..."

"...BUT I COULDN'T MAKE HIM UNDERSTAND."
"HE JUST KEPT GOING ON ABOUT HOW HIS COMIC BOOK HEROES DEVOTED THEIR FANTASTIC POWERS TO HELPING OTHERS."
SAVAGE LEATHERNECK RAIDERS
"NEXT MORNING, THE KID LAPSED INTO A COMA..."


"...AND ME, I HAD A LAPSE OF JUST PLAIN COMMON SENSE."
"ON WENT THE SKI-CAP AGAIN AND I WAS OFF!"
"OFF I FLEW INTO THE CENTER OF THAT CHEMICAL PLANT'S DUMP SITE..."

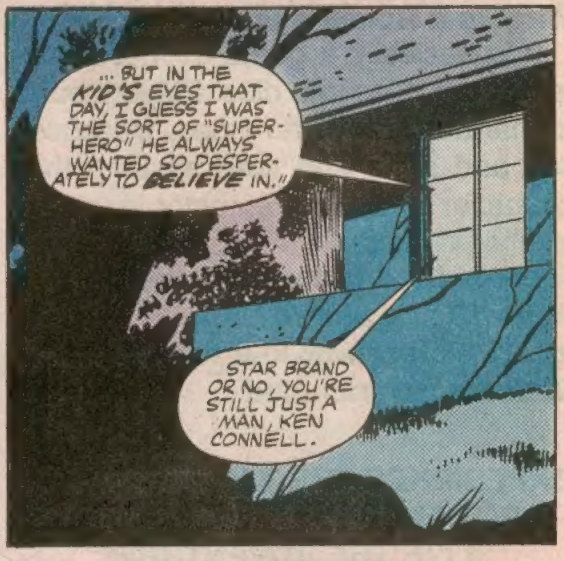

"...AND LORD HELP ME--
--RIGHT THEN AND THERE--
--I USED THE POWER OF THE STAR BRAND TO VAPORIZE EVERY LAST ONE OF THOSE LEAKING TOXIC WASTE CANNISTERS!"

IN BROAD DAYLIGHT?
WHERE THERE MUST HAVE SURELY BEEN EYE-WITNESSES?
YOU DIDN'T, KEN.
TELL ME YOU DIDN'T...

"RELAX, MYRON... IT ALL HAPPENED TOO FAST."
"LONG BEFORE THE SMOKE CLEARED I WAS ALREADY ON MY WAY TO THE HOSPITAL TO CHECK UP ON THE KID."

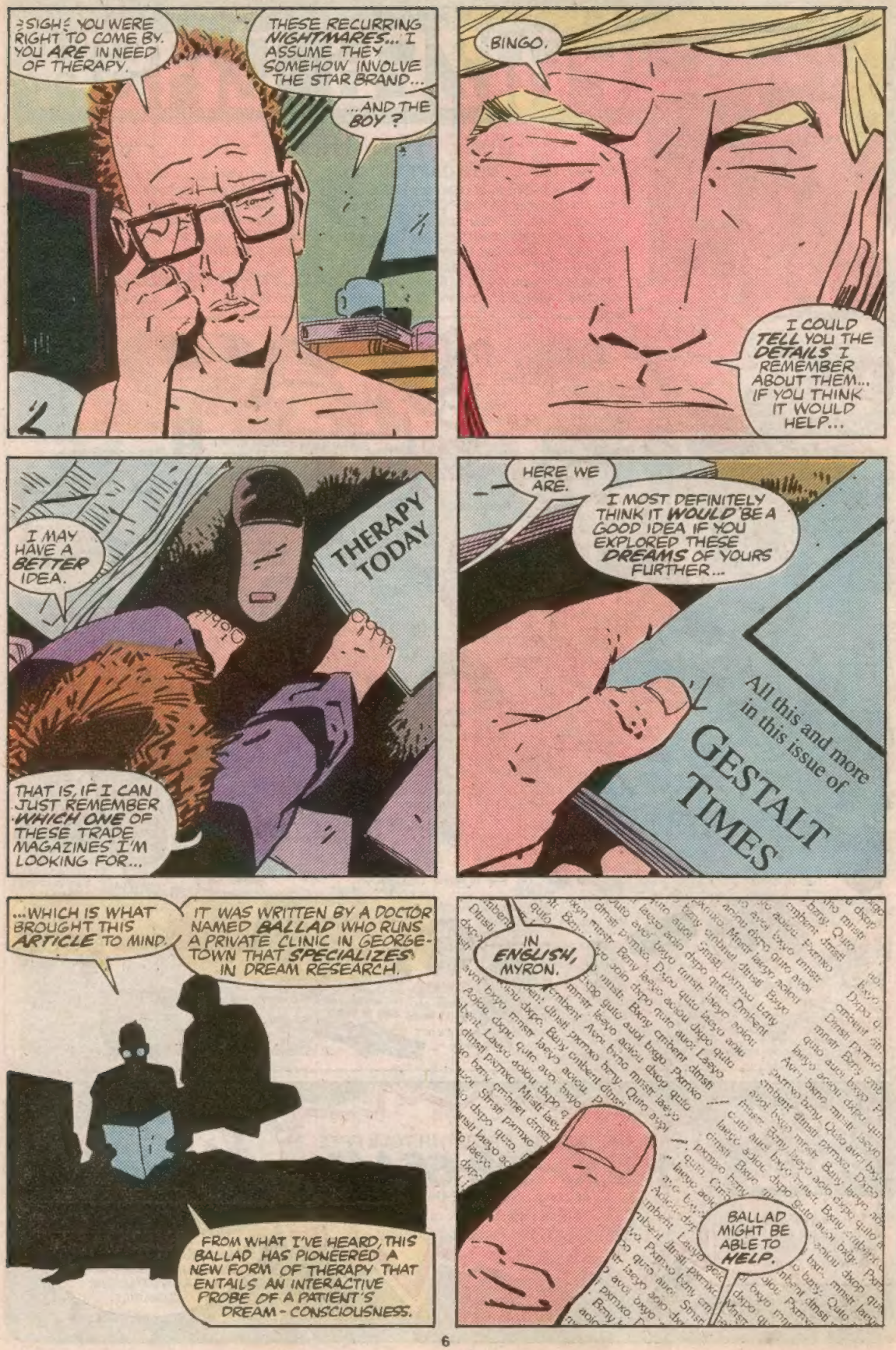
"IT'S LIKE A SICK JOKE, YOU KNOW? HERE I AM, I THOUGHT TO MYSELF, ENTRUSTED WITH THE MOST AWESOME POWER IN THE UNIVERSE...
"... AND THERE I WAS, ABSOLUTELY POWERLESS TO DO ANYTHING TO PROLONG THE LIFE OF ONE TEN YEAR OLD BOY!"

"AFTER I TOLD TAD HOW I INCINERATED THE WASTE DUMP, HE SMILED. I COULD TELL HE WAS PROUD OF ME.
"MYRON, I FELT LIKE A TOTAL WASH-OUT..."

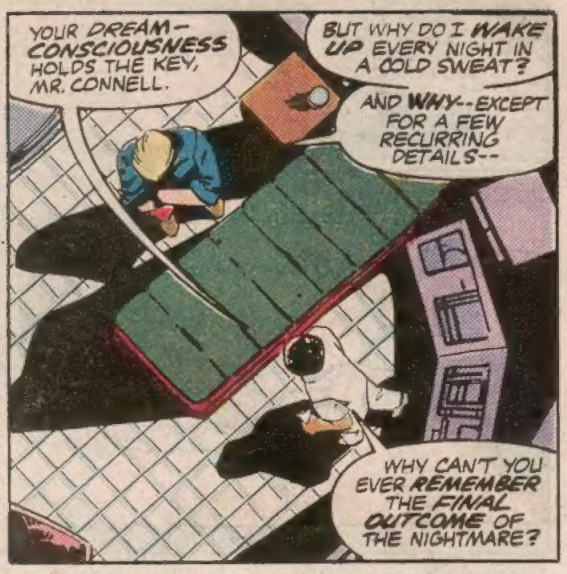

... BUT IN THE KID'S EYES THAT DAY, I GUESS I WAS THE SORT OF "SUPER-HERO" HE ALWAYS WANTED SO DESPERATELY TO BELIEVE IN."
STAR BRAND OR NO, YOU'RE STILL JUST A MAN, KEN CONNELL.

"CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT-- FATE, THE WILL OF GOD... BUT WHATEVER IT IS, IT'S SOMETHING WE MORTALS DON'T GET THE OPTION TO CHANGE."
"YOU TRY TELLING YOURSELF THINGS LIKE THAT OVER AND OVER AT A FUNERAL, MYRON..."

"... AND AFTER AWHILE, THE WORDS DON'T MEAN A DAMN THING."
"ALL I FELT AS THEY WERE PUTTING HIM IN THE GROUND WAS THE
"LOSS. THE PAIN. AND THE GUILT."
"I MUSTN'T LEAVE OUT THE GUILT."

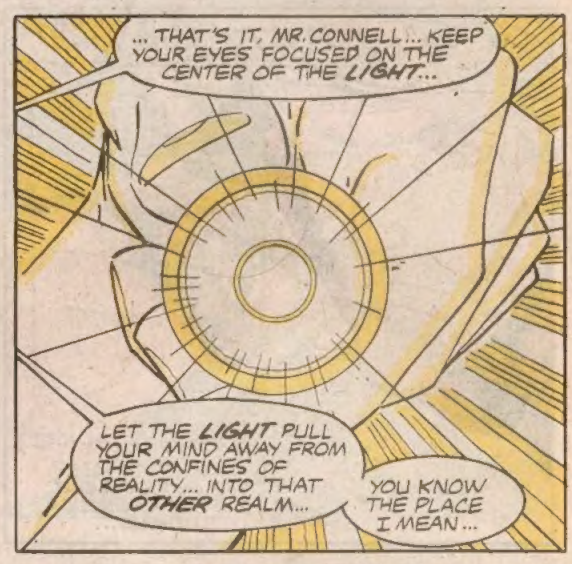

SIGH. YOU WERE RIGHT TO COME BY. YOU ARE IN NEED OF THERAPY.
THESE RECURRING NIGHTMARES... I ASSUME THEY SOMEHOW INVOLVE THE STAR BRAND...
...AND THE BOY?
BINGO.
I COULD TELL YOU THE DETAILS I REMEMBER ABOUT THEM... IF YOU THINK IT WOULD HELP...
I MAY HAVE A BETTER IDEA.
THERAPY TODAY
THAT IS, IF I CAN JUST REMEMBER WHICH ONE OF THESE TRADE MAGAZINES I'M LOOKING FOR...
HERE WE ARE.
I MOST DEFINITELY THINK IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA IF YOU EXPLORED THESE DREAMS OF YOURS FURTHER...
All this and more in this issue of
GESTALT TIMES
...WHICH IS WHAT BROUGHT THIS ARTICLE TO MIND.
IT WAS WRITTEN BY A DOCTOR NAMED BALLAD WHO RUNS A PRIVATE CLINIC IN GEORGETOWN THAT SPECIALIZES IN DREAM RESEARCH.
FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, THIS BALLAD HAS PIONEERED A NEW FORM OF THERAPY THAT ENTAILS AN INTERACTIVE PROBE OF A PATIENT'S DREAM-CONSCIOUSNESS.
IN ENGLISH, MYRON.
BALLAD MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP.

PHEW! I'VE REALLY GOT TO START PAYING MORE ATTENTION TO MAPS.
WHERE IS THE--THERE WE GO. DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.
NOW WHAT.
MYRON SAID GEORGETOWN WAS WHAT? SOUTHWEST OF--
NO.
NORTHWEST, HE SAID.
NORTHWEST FROM WHERE?
FACE IT, CONNELL. YOU'RE LOST.
AT LEAST THERE'S A MORNING FOG STILL HANGING LOW DOWN THERE.
IT OUGHT TO KEEP ME OUT OF SIGHT JUST LONG ENOUGH TO LAND...
"...AND HAIL A CAB"
AT LEAST MYRON REMEMBERED TO WRITE DOWN THE ADDRESS FOR ME.
TAXI
"JUDGING FROM THE DATA YOU FILLED OUT ON YOUR FORM, MR. CONNELL..."
...I BELIEVE YOUR THERAPIST WAS RIGHT. WE MAY INDEED BE ABLE TO HELP YOU.
IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR THE DEATH OF SOMEONE CLOSE TO US TO ACT AS THE CATALYST FOR A RECURRING DREAM DISTURBANCE.
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY HIS PASSING HAS HAD SUCH A TRAUMATIC EFFECT ON YOUR SLEEPING HABITS, CORRECT?
OFF-HAND, MR. CONNELL, I DON'T HAVE AN ANSWER EITHER.
BUT I HAVE A STRONG HUNCH WHERE THE ANSWER CAN BE FOUND.
THAT'S JUST IT, DOC... AS 10 YEAR OLDS GO HE WAS A GREAT KID AND ALL, BUT I DON'T--


YOUR DREAM-CONSCIOUSNESS HOLDS THE KEY, MR. CONNELL.
BUT WHY DO I WAKE UP EVERY NIGHT IN A COLD SWEAT?
AND WHY--EXCEPT FOR A FEW RECURRING DETAILS--
WHY CAN'T YOU EVER REMEMBER THE FINAL OUTCOME OF THE NIGHTMARE?

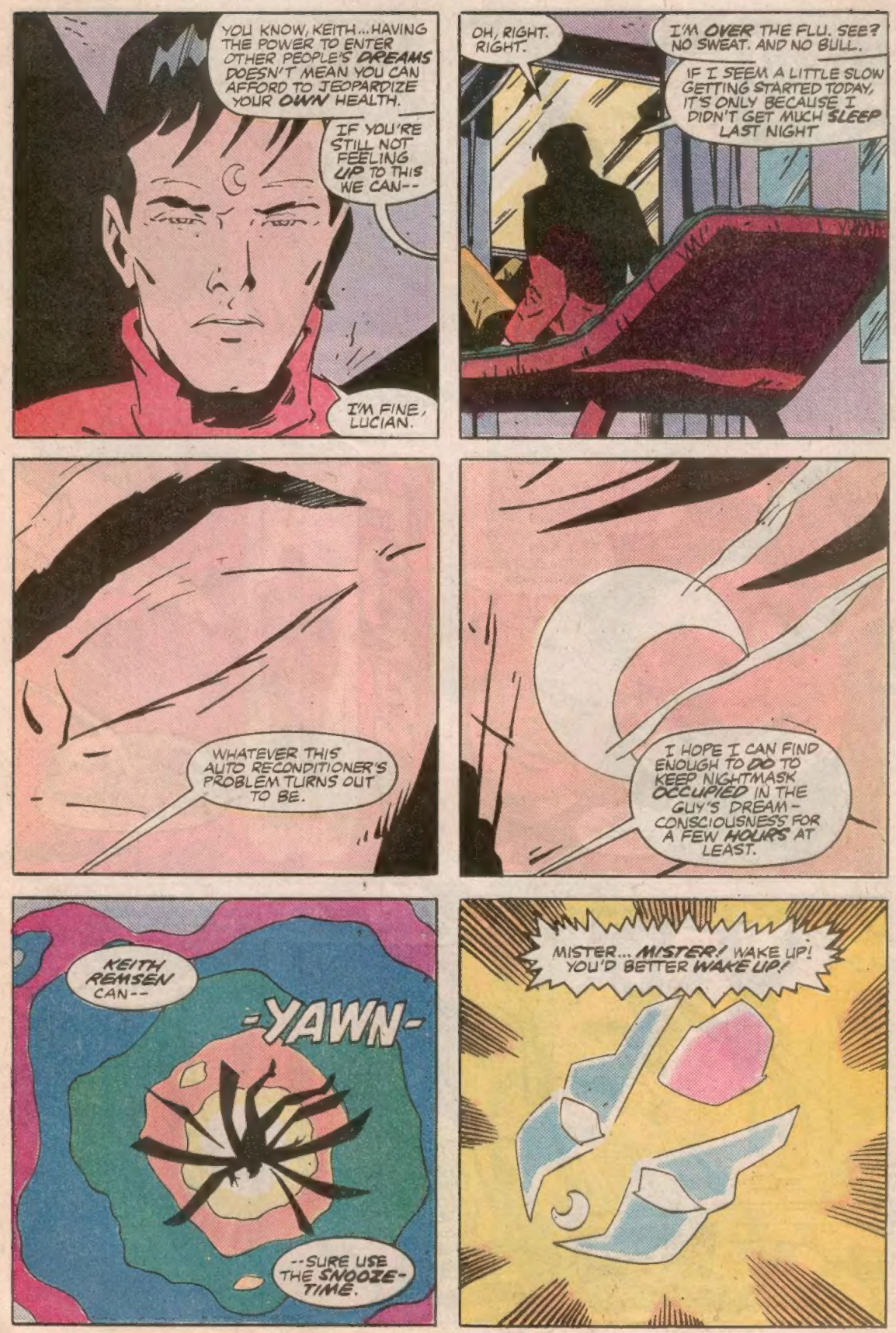
I BELIEVE YOU ARE WRESTLING WITH A SERIOUS INNER CONFLICT YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND IS APPARENTLY UNABLE TO COPE WITH.
A CONFLICT SOME HOW TRIGGERED BY THIS YOUNG BOY'S DEATH
ONLY IF WE PROBE INTO THE DREAM ITSELF CAN WE DISCOVER WHAT THE REAL PROBLEM IS.

IF BALLAD'S METHODS CAN DO WHAT HE CLAIMS, HE MAY SEE SOME FORM OF THE STAR BRAND WHEN HE "EXAMINES" MY NIGHTMARE.
BUT IF THE BRAND DOES SHOW UP IN MY SUBCONSCIOUS... BALLAD'S JUST GOING TO CHALK IT UP AS PART OF THE DREAM-FANTASY.
I HOPE...

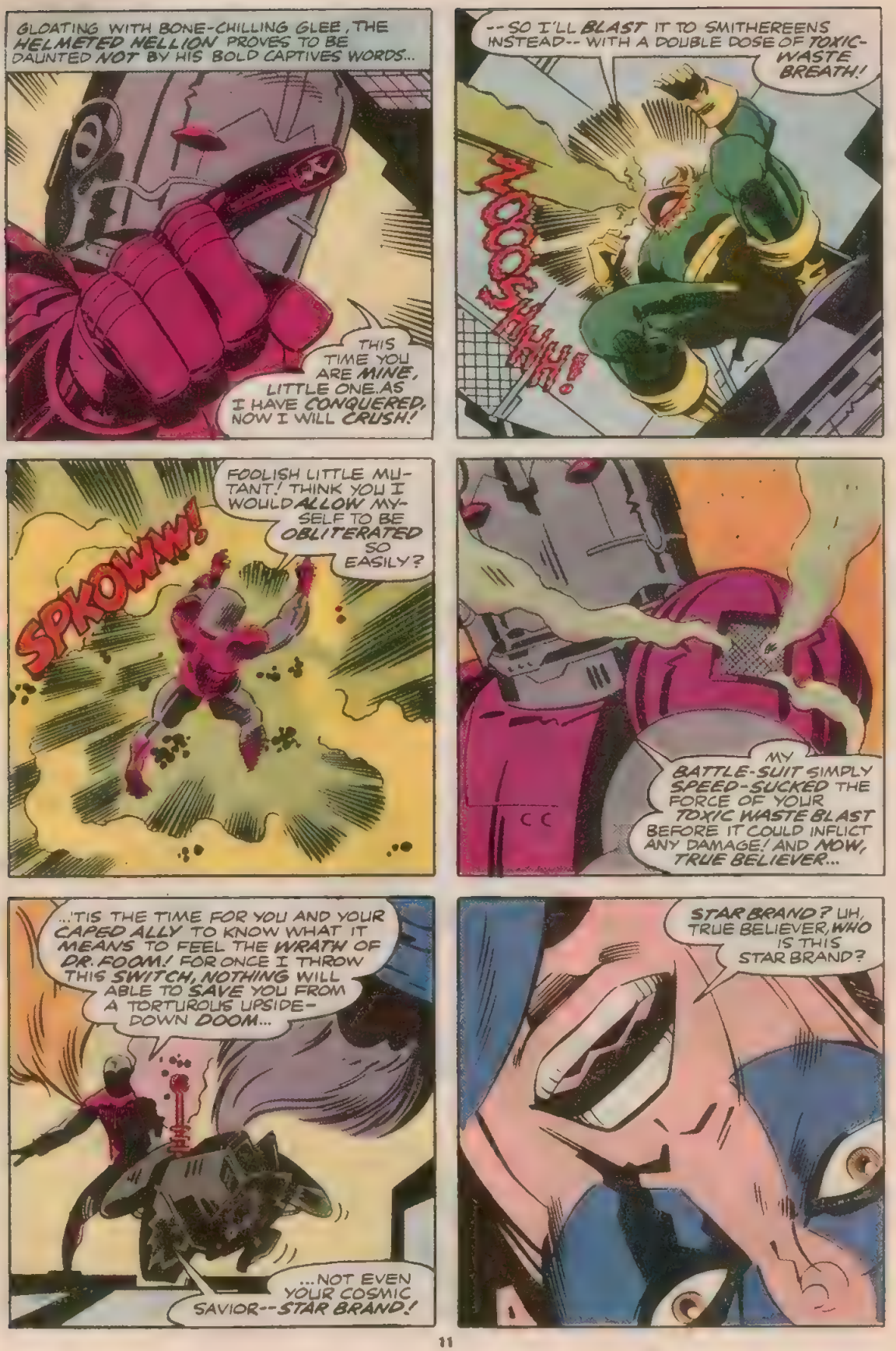

... THAT'S IT, MR. CONNELL... KEEP YOUR EYES FOCUSED ON THE CENTER OF THE LIGHT...
LET THE LIGHT PULL YOUR MIND AWAY FROM THE CONFINES OF REALITY... INTO THAT OTHER REALM...
YOU KNOW THE PLACE I MEAN...

SUBJECT 14C IS UNDER, KEITH. ARE YOU PREPARED TO PROCEED?
14C... LET'S SEE, THAT'S THE LAWYER WHO CAN'T STOP DREAMING ABOUT THE LADY JUDGE WITH THE LARGE--
NO, THAT'S TOMORROW--ISA!

14C IS THE AUTO-RECONDITIONER FROM PITTSBURGH. CONNELL, KEN.
OH. RIGHT.
INDISTINCT RECURRING NIGHTMARE TRIGGERED BY RECENT DEATH OF YOUNG FRIEND, AGE 10.


YOU KNOW, KEITH... HAVING THE POWER TO ENTER OTHER PEOPLE'S DREAMS DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN AFFORD TO JEOPARDIZE YOUR OWN HEALTH.
IF YOU'RE STILL NOT FEELING UP TO THIS WE CAN--
I'M FINE, LUCIAN.
OH, RIGHT. RIGHT.
I'M OVER THE FLU. SEE? NO SWEAT. AND NO BULL.
IF I SEEM A LITTLE SLOW GETTING STARTED TODAY, IT'S ONLY BECAUSE I DIDN'T GET MUCH SLEEP LAST NIGHT
WHATEVER THIS AUTO RECONDITIONER'S PROBLEM TURNS OUT TO BE.
I HOPE I CAN FIND ENOUGH TO DO TO KEEP NIGHTMASK OCCUPIED IN THE GUY'S DREAM-CONSCIOUSNESS FOR A FEW HOURS AT LEAST.
KEITH REMSEN CAN--
-YAWN-
--SURE USE THE SNOOZE-TIME.
MISTER... MISTER! WAKE UP! YOU'D BETTER WAKE UP!

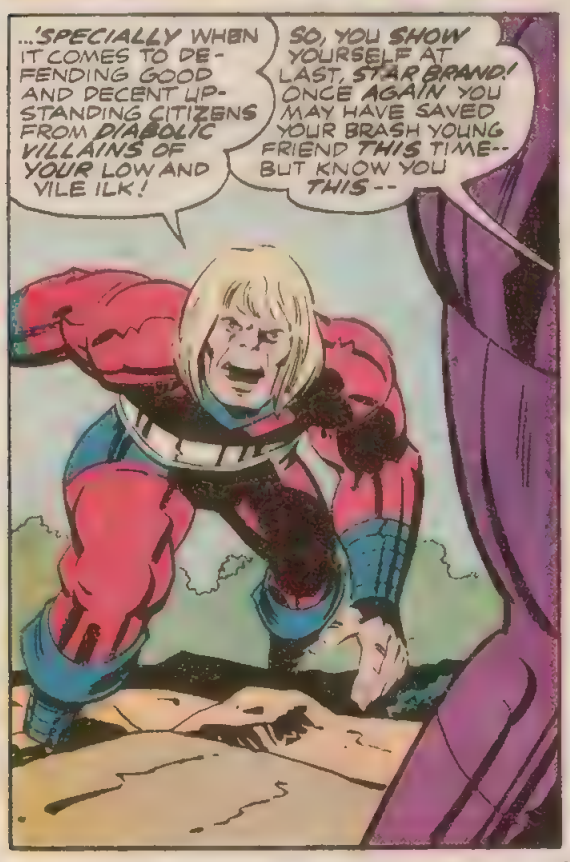
I'M NOT SURPRISED YOU PASSED OUT! THAT WAS SOME FIGHT YOU PUT UP AGAINST DR. FOOM! I GOT A HUNCH YOU MUST BE NEW IN THESE PARTS!
UH... THAT'S RIGHT. I'M... UH... NEW. THEY CALL ME NIGHTMASK!
HOLY COW! THAT MUST BE CONNELL'S DREAM-VERSION OF TAD, THE 10 YEAR-OLD HIS FILE MENTIONED. BUT WHY IS HE WEARING SUCH A HOKEY COSTUME?
A PLEASURE TO BE CAPTURED ALONGSIDE YOU, NIGHTMASK. THEY CALL ME TRUE BELIEVER!
FROM THE WAY YOU WERE GOING AT IT WITH FOOM, YOU MUST HAVE A SCORE OF YOUR OWN TO SETTLE WITH OUR ARCH-NEMESIS.
UH... I DO?
FOOSHHHH!
SO YOU CAN BET OL' LEAD HEAD IS STILL PLENTY PEEVED AT US TOO!
I KNOW NOT YOUR NEW CAPED ALLY, TRUE BELIEVER. BUT LO-- AS YOU DISCOVERED, HE WAS NO MORE A MATCH FOR THE AWESOME MIGHT OF DR. FOOM THAN WERE YOU!
HIS NAME IS NIGHTMASK FOOM--AND HE DOESN'T SCARE ANY EASIER THAN I DO!
BOLD TALK FOR TWO DO-GOODERS DANGLING ON THE BRINK OF THEIR VERY DOOMS!

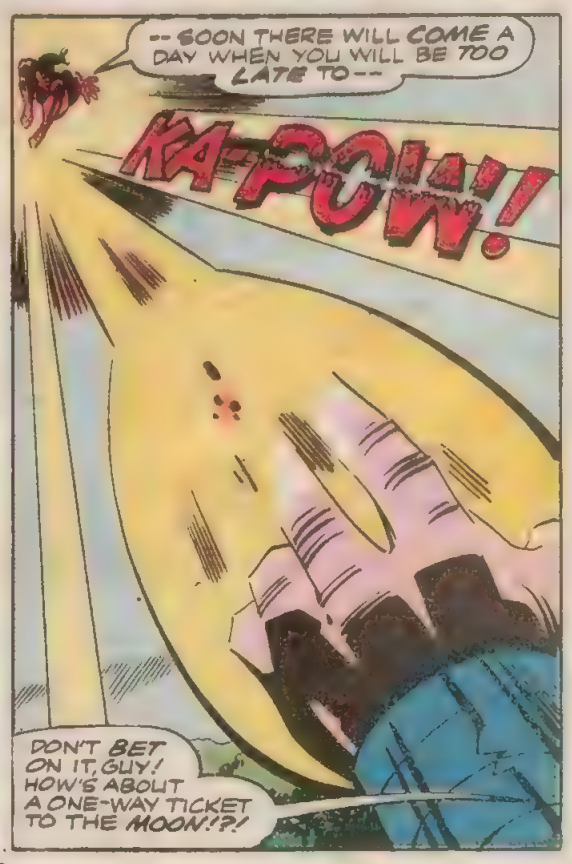

GLOATING WITH BONE-CHILLING GLEE, THE HELMETED MELLION PROVES TO BE DAUNTED NOT BY HIS BOLD CAPTIVES WORDS...
THIS TIME YOU ARE MINE, LITTLE ONE. AS I HAVE CONQUERED, NOW I WILL CRUSH!
--SO I'LL BLAST IT TO SMITHEREENS INSTEAD-- WITH A DOUBLE DOSE OF TOXIC-WASTE BREATH!
WOOSHHH!
FOOLISH LITTLE MUTANT! THINK YOU I WOULD ALLOW MYSELF TO BE OBLITERATED SO EASILY?
SPKOWW!
MY BATTLE-SUIT SIMPLY SPEED-SUCKED THE FORCE OF YOUR TOXIC WASTE BLAST BEFORE IT COULD INFLICT ANY DAMAGE! AND NOW, TRUE BELIEVER...
...'TIS THE TIME FOR YOU AND YOUR CAPED ALLY TO KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO FEEL THE WRATH OF DR. FOOM! FOR ONCE I THROW THIS SWITCH, NOTHING WILL ABLE TO SAVE YOU FROM A TORTUROUS UPSIDE-DOWN DOOM...
...NOT EVEN YOUR COSMIC SAVIOR--STAR BRAND!
STAR BRAND? UH, TRUE BELIEVER, WHO IS THIS STAR BRAND?

WHO IS STAR BRAND? NIGHTMASK, YOU MUST BE FROM SOMEPLACE FAR, FAR AWAY IF YOU HAVE TO ASK!
AROUND HERE, EVERYONE KNOWS AND ADMIRES STAR BRAND! HE IS A SUPER-HERO REKNOWNED THE WORLD OVER!
THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD!
A MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
KRUNNCHH!
AN INCREDIBLE HULK WHO WIELDS THE STRENGTH THAT MAKES HIM THE WORLD'S MIGHTIEST MORTAL!
RUNNKK!
THE PEERLESS POWER OF THE STAR BRAND HAS SAVED MY LIFE, NIGHTMASK--TIME...
WHA--??!
PTHAK!
PTHAK!
PTHOK!
...AND TIME AGAIN!!
KA-POWWW!
BUT EVEN AS A SUDDEN MASSIVE JOLT THROWS TRUE BELIEVER AND NIGHTMASK FREE AND CLEAR OF DR. FOOM'S DEADLY DEVICES...

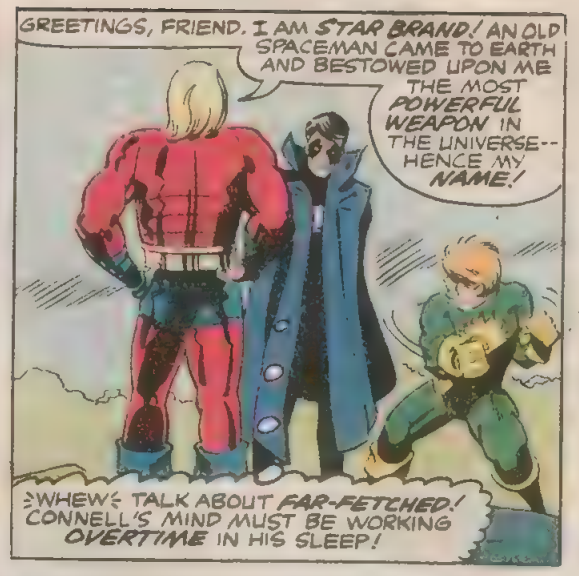
AND EVEN AS THE HUMONGOUS STRONGHOLD TEETERS AT A PRECARIOUS ANGLE--AFTER BEING RENT ASUNDER FROM ITS VERY FOUNDATION...
BAH! NEED I EVEN ASK WHO WOULD DARE INVADE MY DOMAIN?
KLUN CH!

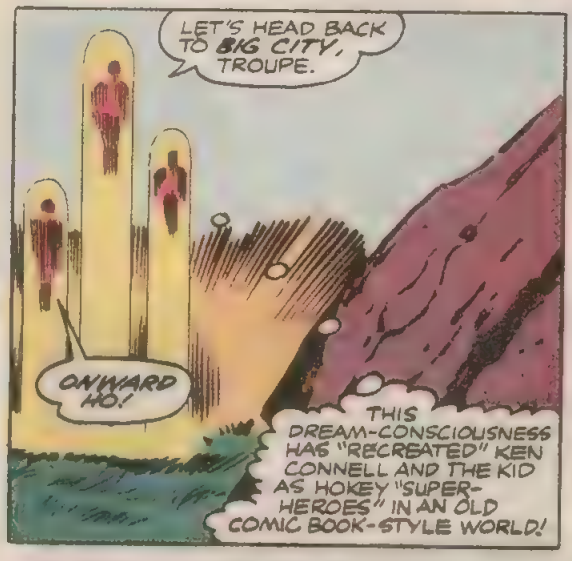
STAND YOU FORTH, MY LONG-HAIRED NEMESIS! WHEN SHALL YOU LEARN THE FOLLY OF DOING BATTLE WITH DR. FOOM--IN A WAR YOU CAN NEVER WIN!
I NEVER SAY NEVER, DR. FOOM...

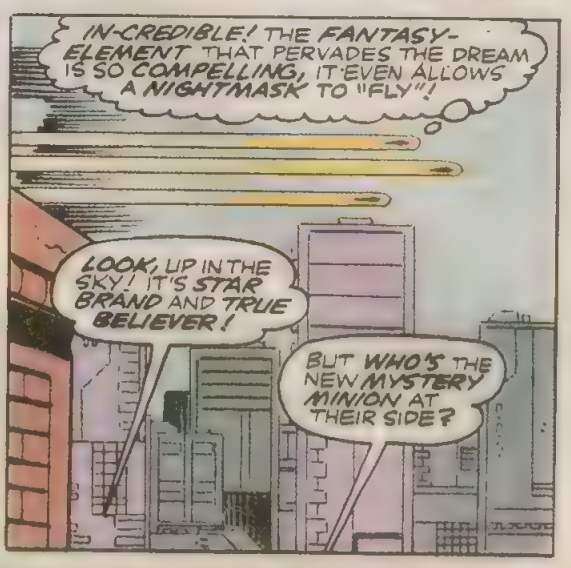

...'SPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO DE-FENDING GOOD AND DECENT UP-STANDING CITIZENS FROM DIABOLIC VILLAINS OF YOUR LOW AND VILE ILK!
SO, YOU SHOW YOURSELF AT LAST, STAR BRAND! ONCE AGAIN YOU MAY HAVE SAVED YOUR BRASH YOUNG FRIEND THIS TIME--BUT KNOW YOU THIS--


--SOON THERE WILL COME A DAY WHEN YOU WILL BE TOO LATE TO--
KA-POW!
DON'T BET ON IT, GUY! HOW'S ABOUT A ONE-WAY TICKET TO THE MOON!?!

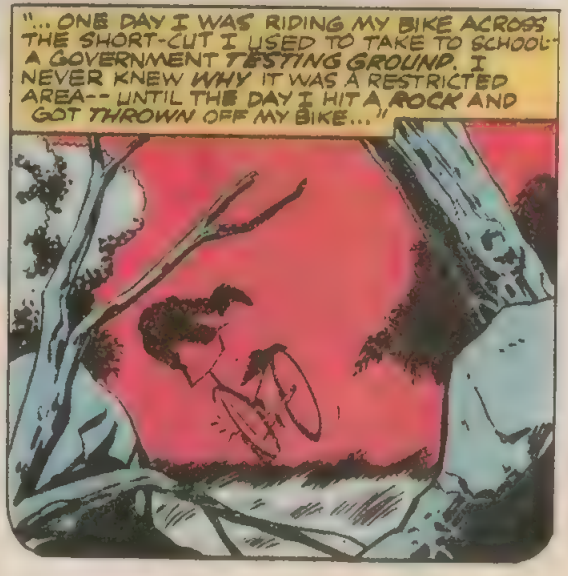
NEXT MOMENT, THE COSMIC CRUSADER BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF AS HE TURNS TO SEE...
TRUE BELIEVER! ARE YOU OKAY?
NEVER BETTER, MENTOR MINE! THAT WAS ONE CLOBBERIN' OLD FOOM ISN'T LIKELY TO FORGET! SAY HELLO TO MY FRIEND NIGHTMASK! HE HATES FOOM TOO!


GREETINGS, FRIEND. I AM STAR BRAND! AN OLD SPACEMAN CAME TO EARTH AND BESTOWED UPON ME THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON IN THE UNIVERSE-- HENCE MY NAME!
≥WHEW≤ TALK ABOUT FAR-FETCHED! CONNELL'S MIND MUST BE WORKING OVERTIME IN HIS SLEEP!

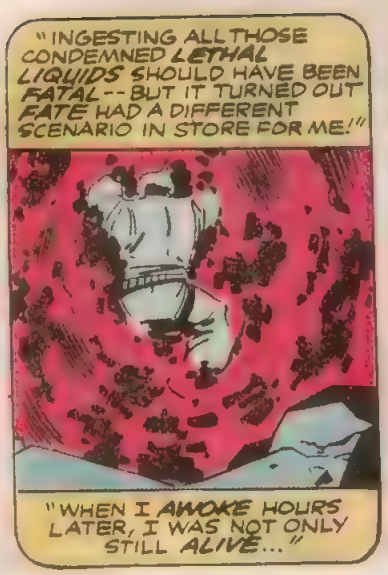

LET'S HEAD BACK TO BIG CITY, TROUPE.
ONWARD HO!
THIS DREAM-CONSCIOUSNESS HAS "RECREATED" KEN CONNELL AND THE KID AS HOKEY "SUPER-HEROES" IN AN OLD COMIC BOOK-STYLE WORLD!

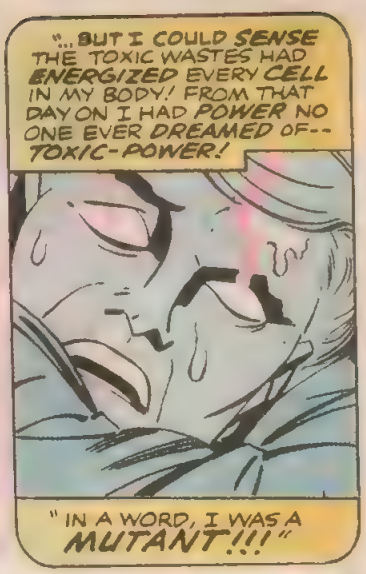

IN-CREDIBLE! THE FANTASY-ELEMENT THAT PERVADES THE DREAM IS SO COMPELLING, IT EVEN ALLOWS A NIGHTMASK TO "FLY"!
LOOK, UP IN THE SKY! IT'S STAR BRAND AND TRUE BELIEVER!
BUT WHO'S THE NEW MYSTERY MINION AT THEIR SIDE?

SO TELL ME, TRUE BELIEVER, WHAT'S YOUR STORY? HOW DID YOU COME BY YOUR... SUPER-POWER? AND HOW DID YOU AND... UH... STAR BRAND HOOK UP?
YOU WANNA HEAR MY SECRET ORIGIN, HUH? WELL, IT ALL STARTED WHEN...

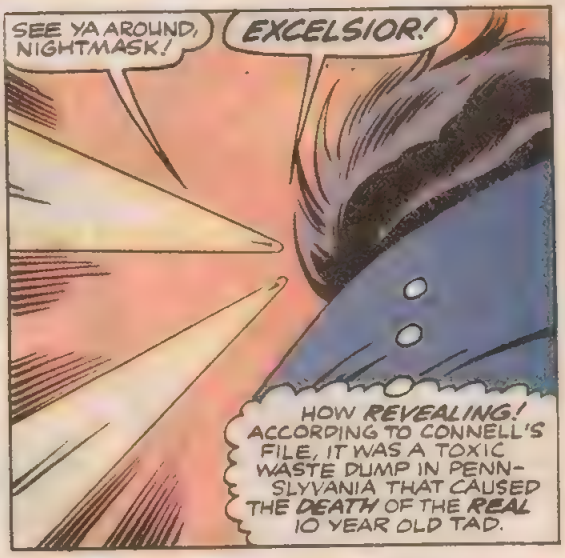

"... ONE DAY I WAS RIDING MY BIKE ACROSS THE SHORT-CUT I USED TO TAKE TO SCHOOL-- A GOVERNMENT TESTING GROUND. I NEVER KNEW WHY IT WAS A RESTRICTED AREA-- UNTIL THE DAY I HIT A ROCK AND GOT THROWN OFF MY BIKE..."

DANGER
TOXIC
WASTE
"I WAS CATAPULTED HEAD-FIRST, NIGHT-MASK--INTO AN OPEN PIT WHERE I PASSED OUT! A PIT BUBBLING WITH EXPERIMENTAL TOXIC WASTE!"

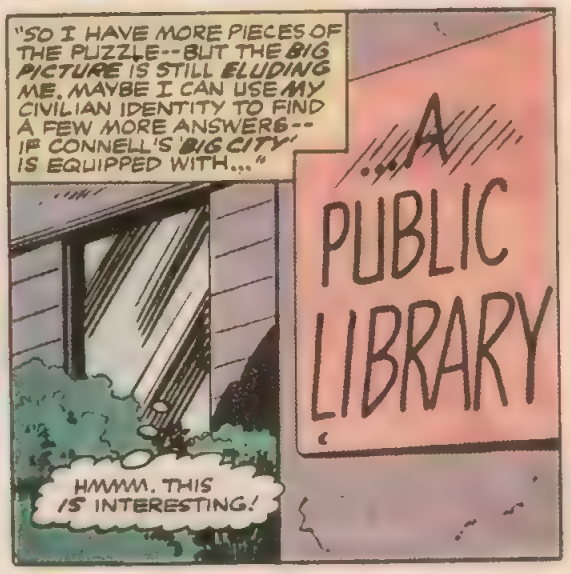

"INGESTING ALL THOSE CONDEMNED LETHAL LIQUIDS SHOULD HAVE BEEN FATAL--BUT IT TURNED OUT FATE HAD A DIFFERENT SCENARIO IN STORE FOR ME!"
"WHEN I AWOKE HOURS LATER, I WAS NOT ONLY STILL ALIVE..."

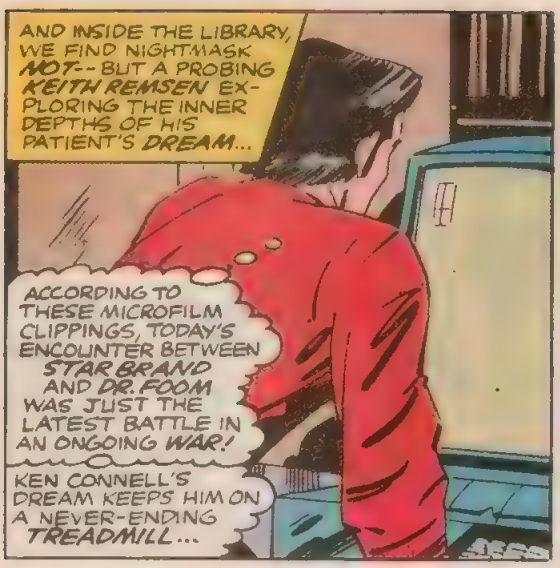

"...BUT I COULD SENSE THE TOXIC WASTES HAD ENERGIZED EVERY CELL IN MY BODY! FROM THAT DAY ON I HAD POWER NO ONE EVER DREAMED OF--TOXIC-POWER!
"IN A WORD, I WAS A MUTANT!!!"

THAT'S SOME STORY.
BUT ALAS, THE STORY OF HOW MY YOUNG PROTEGE AND I MET WILL HAVE TO WAIT TILL ANOTHER DAY! IT IS TIME FOR TRUE AND I TO RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE IN OUR SECRET IDENTITIES!

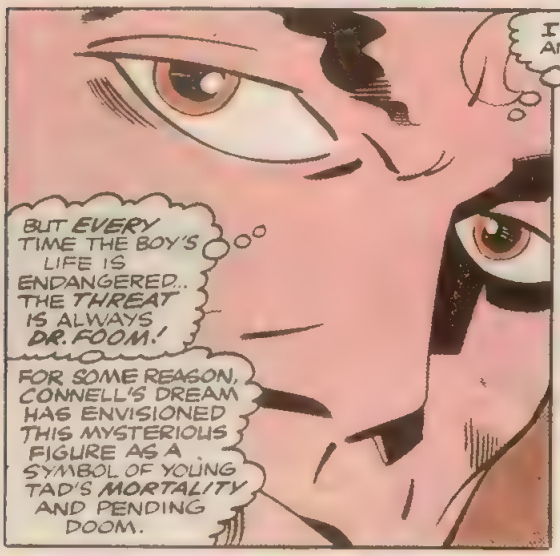

SEE YA AROUND, NIGHTMASK!
EXCELSIOR!
HOW REVEALING! ACCORDING TO CONNELL'S FILE, IT WAS A TOXIC WASTE DUMP IN PENN-SLYVANIA THAT CAUSED THE DEATH OF THE REAL 10 YEAR OLD TAD.

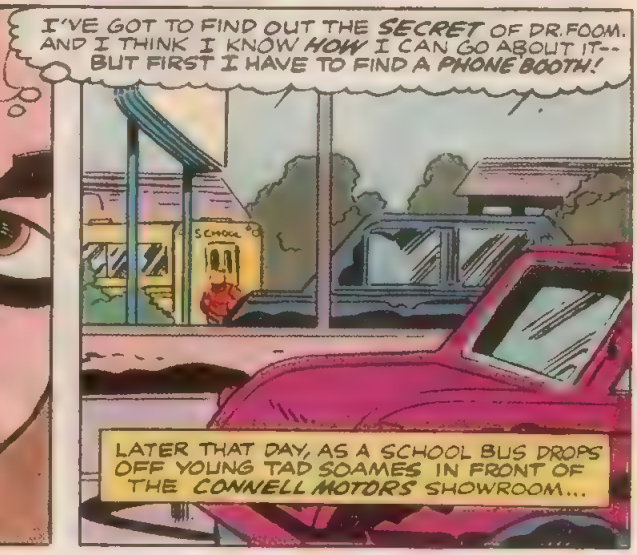
BUT HERE IN CONNELL'S DREAM-SCENARIO, THE DEADLY TOXINS DIDN'T KILL TAD--THEY GAVE HIM AWESOME POWERS INSTEAD!
AS I RECALL THE COMIC BOOKS I USED TO READ RAN RAMPANT WITH YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN WHO MUTATED TO BECOME COSTUMED HEROES OF SOME SORT.


"SO I HAVE MORE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE--BUT THE BIG PICTURE IS STILL ELUDING ME. MAYBE I CAN USE MY CIVILIAN IDENTITY TO FIND A FEW MORE ANSWERS--IF CONNELL'S 'BIG CITY' IS EQUIPPED WITH..."
...A PUBLIC LIBRARY
HMMM. THIS IS INTERESTING!

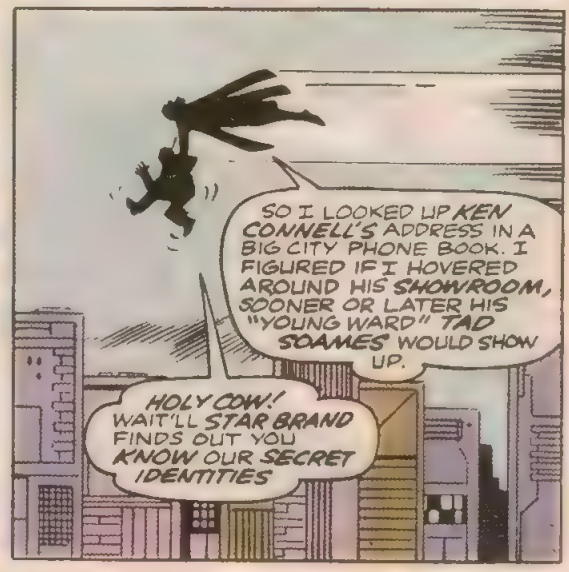

AND INSIDE THE LIBRARY, WE FIND NIGHTMASK NOT-- BUT A PROBING KEITH REMSEN EXPLORING THE INNER DEPTHS OF HIS PATIENT'S DREAM...
ACCORDING TO THESE MICROFILM CLIPPINGS, TODAY'S ENCOUNTER BETWEEN STAR BRAND AND DR. FOOM WAS JUST THE LATEST BATTLE IN AN ONGOING WAR!
KEN CONNELL'S DREAM KEEPS HIM ON A NEVER-ENDING TREADMILL...

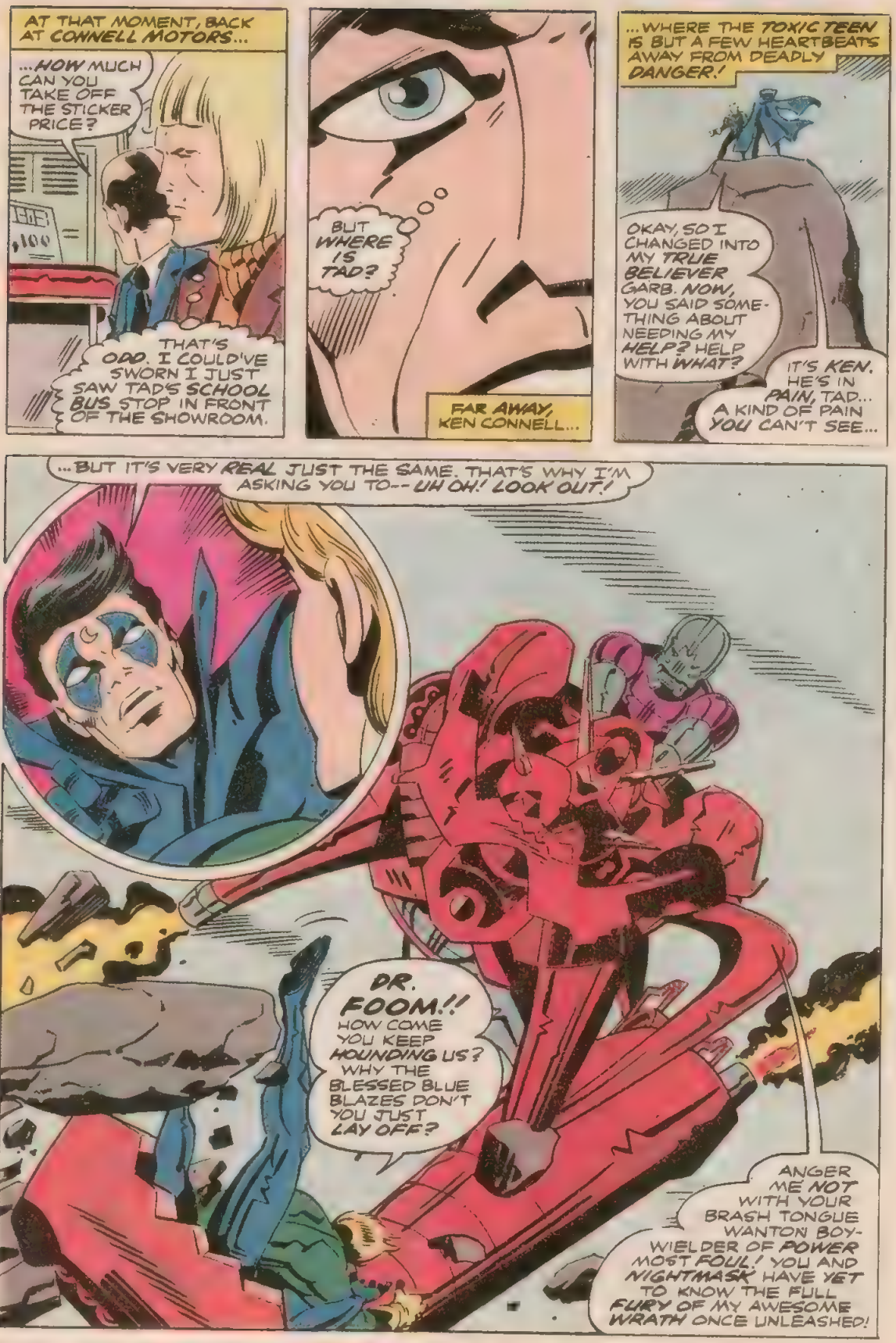
...WHERE HE IS FORCED TO USE HIS "STAR BRAND" TO SAVE THE LIFE OF TRUE BELIEV-ER... TAD SOAMES... AGAIN AND AGAIN.

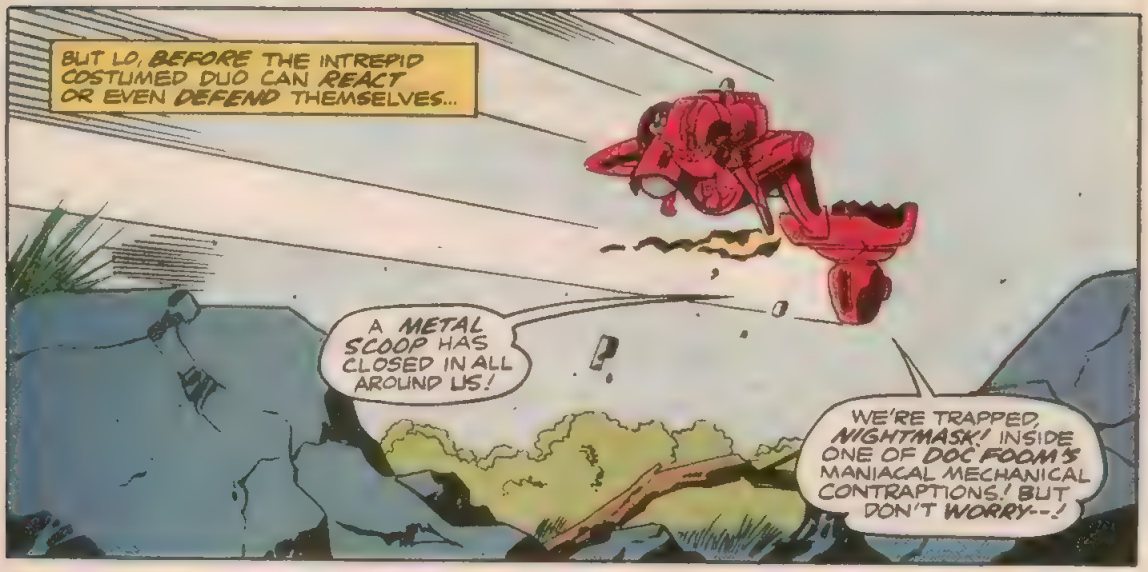

BUT EVERY TIME THE BOY'S LIFE IS ENDANGERED... THE THREAT IS ALWAYS DR. FOOM!
FOR SOME REASON, CONNELL'S DREAM HAS ENVISIONED THIS MYSTERIOUS FIGURE AS A SYMBOL OF YOUNG TAD'S MORTALITY AND PENDING DOOM.

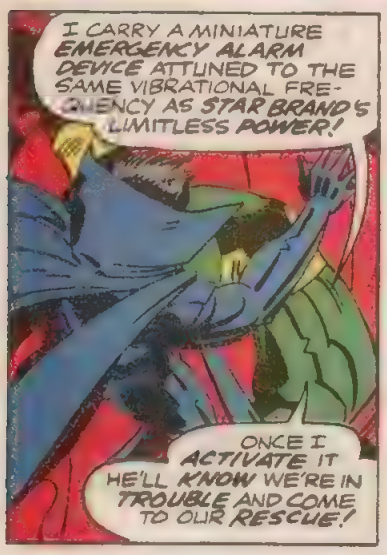

I'VE GOT TO FIND OUT THE SECRET OF DR. FOOM. AND I THINK I KNOW HOW I CAN GO ABOUT IT-- BUT FIRST I HAVE TO FIND A PHONE BOOTH!
SCHOOL
LATER THAT DAY, AS A SCHOOL BUS DROPS OFF YOUNG TAD SOAMES IN FRONT OF THE CONNELL MOTORS SHOWROOM...

SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING...
HEYYY! OH, IT'S YOU NIGHT-MASK! WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA HERE?
THAT'S JUST WHAT I WANT TO FIND OUT, TAD-- BUT TO DO THE JOB I KNEW I'D NEED TRUE BELIEVER'S HELP!


SO I LOOKED UP KEN CONNELL'S ADDRESS IN A BIG CITY PHONE BOOK. I FIGURED IF I HOVERED AROUND HIS SHOWROOM, SOONER OR LATER HIS "YOUNG WARD" TAD SOAMES WOULD SHOW UP.
HOLY COW! WAIT'LL STAR BRAND FINDS OUT YOU KNOW OUR SECRET IDENTITIES

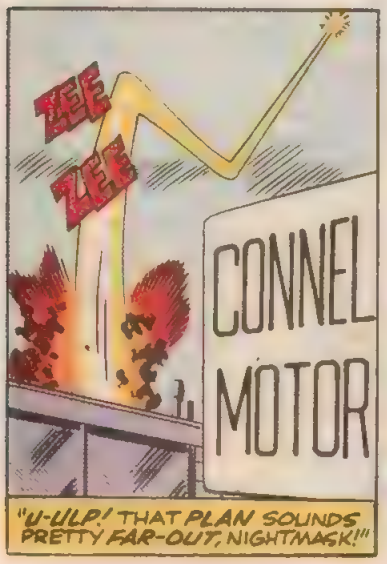

AT THAT MOMENT, BACK AT CONNELL MOTORS...
...HOW MUCH CAN YOU TAKE OFF THE STICKER PRICE?
THAT'S ODD. I COULD'VE SWORN I JUST SAW TAD'S SCHOOL BUS STOP IN FRONT OF THE SHOWROOM.
BUT WHERE IS TAD?
FAR AWAY, KEN CONNELL...
...WHERE THE TOXIC TEEN IS BUT A FEW HEARTBEATS AWAY FROM DEADLY DANGER!
OKAY, SO I CHANGED INTO MY TRUE BELIEVER GARB. NOW, YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT NEEDING MY HELP? HELP WITH WHAT?
IT'S KEN. HE'S IN PAIN, TAD... A KIND OF PAIN YOU CAN'T SEE...
...BUT IT'S VERY REAL JUST THE SAME. THAT'S WHY I'M ASKING YOU TO-- UH OH! LOOK OUT!
DR. FOOM!! HOW COME YOU KEEP HOUNDING US? WHY THE BLESSED BLUE BLAZES DON'T YOU JUST LAY OFF?
ANGER ME NOT WITH YOUR BRASH TONGUE WANTON BOY-WIELDER OF POWER MOST FOUL! YOU AND NIGHTMASK HAVE YET TO KNOW THE FULL FURY OF MY AWESOME WRATH ONCE UNLEASHED!


BUT LO, BEFORE THE INTREPID COSTUMED DUO CAN REACT OR EVEN DEFEND THEMSELVES...
A METAL SCOOP HAS CLOSED IN ALL AROUND US!
WE'RE TRAPPED, NIGHTMASK! INSIDE ONE OF DOC FOOM'S MANIACAL MECHANICAL CONTRAPTIONS! BUT DON'T WORRY--!


I CARRY A MINIATURE EMERGENCY ALARM DEVICE ATTUNED TO THE SAME VIBRATIONAL FREQUENCY AS STAR BRAND'S LIMITLESS POWER!
ONCE I ACTIVATE IT HE'LL KNOW WE'RE IN TROUBLE AND COME TO OUR RESCUE!

THEN WE HAVE TO HURRY! WE CAN BOTH HELP YOUR MENTOR DEFEAT DR. FOOM ONCE AND FOR ALL-- BUT YOU'VE GOT TO TRUST ME.
'NUFF SAID, NIGHTMASK! I KNOW A GOOD GUY WHEN I SEE ONE!

THERE! NOW STARBRAND WILL BE ON HIS WAY!
ZEE
ZEE
JUST TELL ME WHAT YOU WANT ME TO DO...


ZEE
ZEE
CONNEL MOTOR
"U-ULP! THAT PLAN SOUNDS PRETTY FAR-OUT, NIGHTMASK!"

NOW THAT WE'RE INSIDE FOOM'S STRONGHOLD--HOW DO YOU PLAN TO 'TAKE OVER' MY BODY? WHO ARE YOU, ANYWAY?

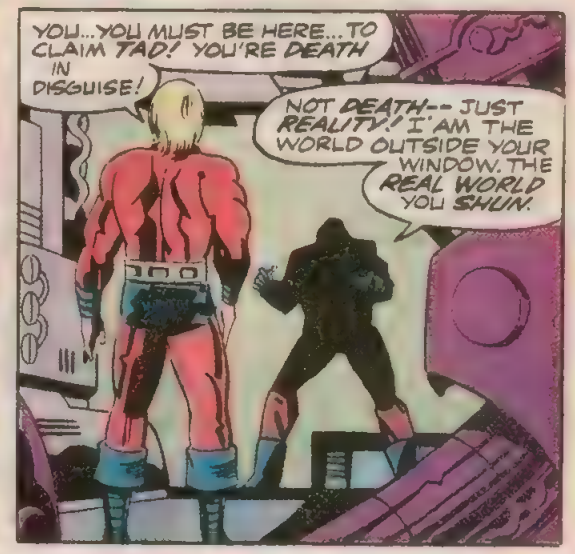
JUST SOMEONE OUT OF A DREAM, TAD... JUST LIKE YOU.

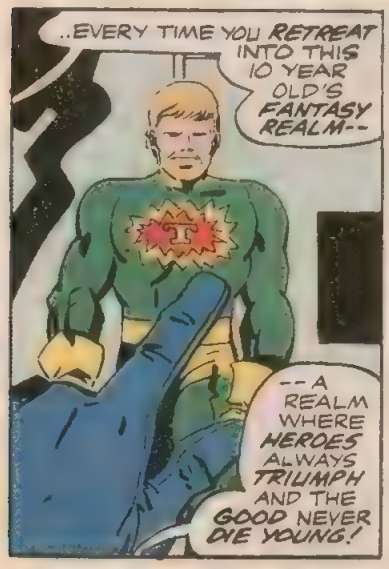
WHAT IS THIS? HOW DID HE WHO IS CALLED NIGHTMASK VANISH FROM MY CLUTCHES INTO THIN AIR?
NIGHTWHO?
IT MATTERS NOT. YOU ARE THE ONE I SEEK. WE ARE THE WORLD, MY LITTLE BELIEVER.
WE KNOW EVERYONE ELSE HERE ARE PRISONERS OF HE WHO BELIEVES IN YOU. BUT HEAR MY VOW-- IT SHALL NOT BE THUS MUCH LONGER!
GEE, THANKS FOR THE SERMONETTE, DOC.
BUT US TRUE BELIEVERS-- BEFORE WE START LISTENING, WE LIKE TO KNOW WHO'S DOING THE PREACHING!
NO! NOT MY HELMET!
HOLY--!! YOU!!?
DR. FOOM IS ANOTHER KEN CONNELL!??
EXCEPT I'M THE GENUINE ITEM, KID.
I'M YOUR KEN CONNELL'S WORST NIGHTMARE-- COME TO LIFE!
MY STAR BRAND AND ME, WE'RE THE REAL WORLD!
THWAKKK!
THEN WHAT DOES THAT MAKE ME, ACE-- CHOPPED LIVER?
STAR BRAND!! I...UH...KNEW YOU'D SAVE ME!

YOU!? YOU WERE FOOM ALL ALONG!?
DON'T YOU GET IT, CONNELL? THERE IS NO 'DR. FOOM"!! THERE NEVER WAS!
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, TRUE BELIEVER--

--I'M GOING TO RID OUR WORLD OF THIS MOST MONSTROUS SCOURGE ONCE AND FOR ALL!
FOOSHHH
CAN'T BE DONE, MY FRIEND.

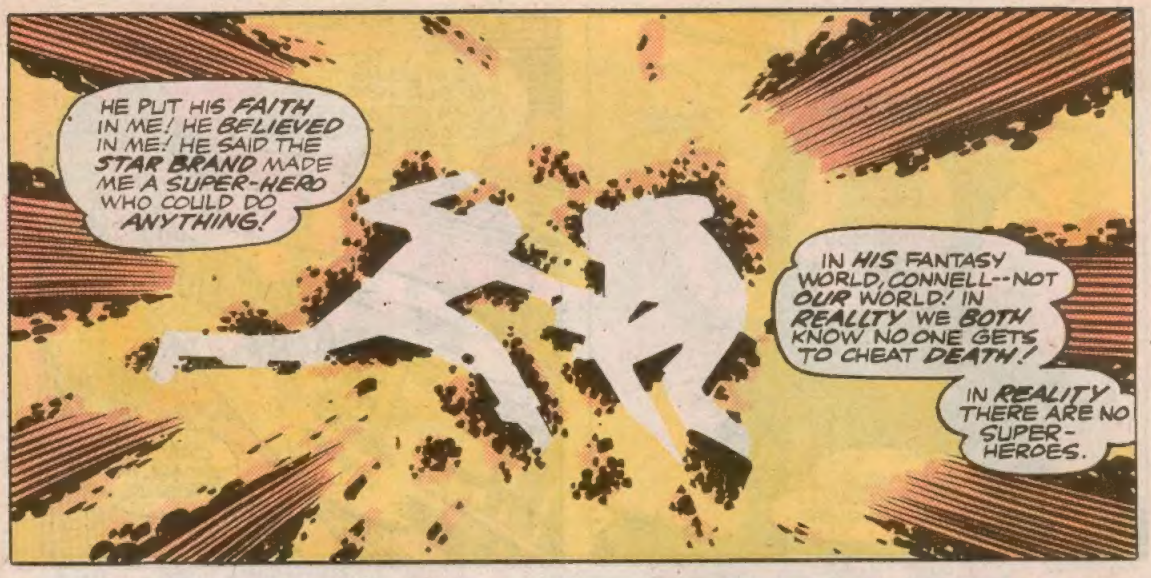
YOU MAY WIELD THE MOST AWESOME POWER IN THE UNIVERSE-- BUT NOT EVEN THE MIGHT OF THE STAR BRAND CAN STOP ME.
AND CAN YOU GUESS WHY, KEN CONNELL?


YOU...YOU MUST BE HERE...TO CLAIM TAD! YOU'RE DEATH IN DISGUISE!
NOT DEATH-- JUST REALITY! I AM THE WORLD OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW. THE REAL WORLD YOU SHUN.


..EVERY TIME YOU RETREAT INTO THIS 10 YEAR OLD'S FANTASY REALM--
--A REALM WHERE HEROES ALWAYS TRIUMPH AND THE GOOD NEVER DIE YOUNG!

I WAS RIGHT! UNMASKING "FOOM" WAS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD RESOLVING THE CONFLICT IN CONNELL'S DREAM.
BUT WHY DO I GET THE FEELING THERE'S MORE GOING ON HERE THAN ME OR DOC BALLAD ARE MEANT TO UNDERSTAND?

NO!
DEEP DOWN YOU KNOW THE BRUTAL TRUTH! YOU KNOW THAT IN THE REAL WORLD, THAT POOR KID DIDN'T HAVE A PRAYER! YOU COULDN'T SAVE HIM! NO ONE COULD!


HE PUT HIS FAITH IN ME! HE BELIEVED IN ME! HE SAID THE STAR BRAND MADE ME A SUPER-HERO WHO COULD DO ANYTHING!
IN HIS FANTASY WORLD, CONNELL--NOT OUR WORLD! IN REALITY WE BOTH KNOW NO ONE GETS TO CHEAT DEATH!
IN REALITY THERE ARE NO SUPER-HEROES.

UH OH! I'D REALLY LIKE TO STICK AROUND AND HEAR THE REST OF CONNELL'S MONOLOGUE TO HIMSELF--
--BUT THIS "BATTLE OF THE STAR BRANDS" IS BRINGING THE DREAM TO A SUDDEN END!

TIME TO "EXORCISE" MYSELF FROM THE TRUE BELIEVER AND LEAVE CONNELL'S SUBCONSCIOUS BEFORE HE WAKES UP--

--SO I'M OUTA HERE!

YOU WERE CHOSEN TO POSSESS THE STAR BRAND FOR A REASON, KEN CONNELL--SO MAYBE IN SOME WAY YOU ARE A SPECIAL BREED.
MAYBE THAT'S WHY YOU MEANT SO MUCH TO THE KID BEFORE HE DIED!

HE DIED? HE DIED?
YES! TAD DIED!
THE TRUE BELIEVER'S WORLD IS ALL A DREAM!

I'M FREE NOW--
FREE TO GO BACK--
--BACK TO REALITY! TO STAY!

...AND MR. CONNELL'S RACING PULSE-RATE SLOWED BACK DOWN TO NORMAL... JUST BEFORE HIS DREAM ENDED.
ALL SIGNS INDICATE YOUR MISSION WAS SUCCESSFUL.
YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT, LUCIAN. IT WAS LIKE SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT OF A COMIC--
YOU MUST TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT, KEITH... LATER. RIGHT NOW, YOU'D BETTER VANISH.
IF CONNELL RECOGNIZES YOU FROM HIS DREAM, WE'LL HAVE A LOT OF EXPLAINING TO DO.
'NUFF SAID!
...I STILL CAN'T REMEMBER ALL THE DETAILS, DR. BALLAD.
BUT FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WASN'T IN A COLD SWEAT WHEN I WOKE UP.
I THINK I'LL BE SLEEPING A LOT BETTER FROM HERE ON OUT.
WE THINK YOU WILL TOO, MR. CONNELL.
HAVE A SAFE TRIP BACK TO PITTSBURGH.
WEIRD. WE NEVER REALLY "MET"... YET SOMEHOW I HAVE THE FEELING NIGHT-MASK MET A SIDE OF KEN CONNELL THAT MOST PEOPLE NEVER GET TO SEE.
THAT "STAR BRAND" OF HIS... NOW THAT WAS REALLY SOMETHING!
THERE IT IS AGAIN. IN THE BACK OF MY MIND--A STRANGE FACE!
JUST A FLEETING GLIMPSE OF A FACE... WEARING A MASK.
SOMEONE I DON'T QUITE RECALL FROM THE DREAM MAYBE?
I CAN'T BE SURE.
BUT ONE THING I AM SURE OF. IN MY GUT.
WHOEVER HE WAS... WHEREVER HE WALKS...
... HE IS A FRIEND.

Editor-Michael Higgins **Assistant Editor-Michael Rockwitz**
MARVEL COMICS GROUP—387 Park Avenue South—New York, New York—10016
Attention correspondents: if you don't want your full address printed, please be sure to tell us so!

Dear Michael,

I must admit I was not expecting anything special from Marvel's New Universe titles, despite all the publicity—or maybe because of it. But I always try to give any new comic a chance to rouse my interest, so I bought STAR BRAND #1 with a few misgivings.

I'm happy to say that STAR BRAND was really very good. Jim Shooter has had a great record so far as a writer. The pacing and plotting of this opening chapter were excellent. By the time I finished, I was convinced I'd read a 40 pager, not a standard size book—there was so much happening. But there was no sense of things being crammed into the pages. Things developed in a natural way, paced smoothly so as to create a very believable atmosphere to the sequence of fantastic events.

The dialogue was another strong point of the issue. Ken Connell came across as a very real person because, for the most part, he spoke and thought in terms I believe I would use myself. Ken and his personal life are highly interesting, and I look forward to learning a lot more about his relationships with Barbara, the kids and Deb. Even Myron and John struck me as being more than just "decoration."

The origin of Ken's super-powers and the nature of the Starbrand look promising. As all good origin stories should, this one posed as many questions as it answered. Judging by this first issue, I expect Jim to start filling in all the blanks slowly and carefully. I expect STAR BRAND to be a pretty suspenseful book.

John Romita Jr. and Al Williamson make a good pairing. This is some of the best artwork I've seen from John. Al is one of those inkers who can enhance a pencil job without smothering it completely. The special effects were as varied and interesting as any I have see before. Layouts were good, too, helping the flow of the story. Creatively, STAR BRAND is a crack team book. That includes coloring and lettering, of course, both of which were executed so well as to go almost unnoticed until I took a moment to look back after I had read the story, which is as it should be.

A great start!

All the best,
Dale Coe
56 Whitecross Road
Warrington
Cheshire, WA5 1LR
England

Dear Marvel,

Fantastic! At long last there is a hero from Pittsburgh, or at least in the general vicinity. When you said that this could happen right outside your window you weren't joking! I live close to where the events in STAR BRAND #1 took place and I found it rather enjoyable to see how authentic the settings in the book actually were. Please don't ruin it and have Ken move to New York or Los Angeles. Keep him where he is.

As for the story, I thought it was interesting in that it showed more of the character's personal life rather than him beating up a gang of villains. The artwork was exceptionally good. John Romita, Jr., and Al Williamson really seem to work well as a team. With stories and art like this you have a winner on your hands. Keep up the good work.

Ron Gaupin
2557 Kensington Dr.
New Kensington, Pa 15068

Dear Jim, John, Al, and co,

I wasn't sure I'd be interested in collecting any of the New Universe titles which came out this summer. I decided to take the risk on the first issue of STAR BRAND. You don't know how happy I am now that I took that chance. STAR BRAND is great!

C. Redwood
109-98 202nd St.
Flushing, NY 11412

Dear Marvel,

The first issue of STAR BRAND was my favorite of all the New Universe titles. the character of Ken Connell is the best example of what the New Universe is all about. He actually leads a normal life and encounters problems that anyone might find himself in. The scene that I feel best illustrates this is when he was so frightened that he wet his pants! What other comic book character would react in such a manner!

Not only is Ken human he's also very cute! I am looking forward to the following issues to see the development of what I find to be a very interesting character.

Phay Green
7 Headley Place
Iselin, NJ 08830

Dear Star Clan,

STAR BRAND #1 was an outstanding achievement for Marvel. I loved John Romita Jr's and Al Williamson's art and Jim Shooter's writing was awesome (maybe he should quit being editor in chief and become a full time writer)!

Cyrus Johnson
1235 S. Melville St.
Philadelphia, PA 19143

Dear Star Branders,

I just finished reading STAR BRAND #1 and I have only one thing to say: "Fantastic!" Kenneth Connell is a terrific character. Don't get me wrong, other Marvel characters seem real, but this guy is human. I am especially glad to see that he is a part of the New Universe. A unique character like Ken deserves to be in his own universe.

I must also commend you on the cast of supporting characters that have appeared within the issue. Myron, Debbie The Duck, Barbara and even John Eberhardt make this comic even more enjoyable.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jim Shooter, John Romita, Jr. and everyone else responsible for launching such a great premiere issue.

Branded a fan forever.

Keith Krueger
19011 146th St.
Elk River, Mn 55330

We'd like to pause here to thank all of you for your letters of praise on our premiere issue. It looks like STAR BRAND has found quite a following out there.

Now, since we've fallen so far behind in sorting through the mail, here are a few random samplings of your comments on what's been happening in STAR BRAND so far . . .

Dear STAR BRAND,

STAR BRAND is intriguing to me. I think it best expresses the premises Jim Shooter postulated for the New Universe. How would a person really react to suddenly receiving such power? You got it. Then, rather than merely the glorification of neurosis that is popular in comics today, we find a philosophy of hope and self-improvement that is actually insightful. This is truly a new leap forward for comics.

Having acknowledged Shooter's genius, I'd also like to compliment Saviuk and Colletta on the art on issue #3. Quite good, though not as revolutionary. A few throwbacks to ordinary comic art. Specifically, issue #2, page 7, panel 2. The weight of a car cannot be supported on a thin sheet of metal or fiberglass—it could only be lifted by the frame. Issue #3, on the cover and on page eleven, panel 13, planes are not covered by 1 or 2 inch thick metal. Issue 3, page twenty-one, panel 5, the metal used in the hinge of a car door is thicker than any in the rest of the door—Kenny would have gotten a handle in one hand and a strip of sheet metal in the other. He could have reached into the door, grabbing a hinge on one side and the lock mechanism in the other. too picky? Well, you said you were going to follow real physics.

Points of physics often butchered by comic book artists besides structural strength include leverage and center of gravity (picking up something far outside its center of gravity such as a horizontal log by one end), and equal reaction to action. Actually, you're doing pretty good with these.

The grand experiment is definitely a success.

Ed Bloemendaal
514 Commerce St. #31
Dallas, TX 75208

The limits of Ken's Star Brand power are still unknown, Ed. He's still in the process of discovering what he can and cannot do. It is known that his strength is connected somehow to his conscious will; that is, he seems to be as strong as he needs to be when he wants to be, so perhaps the fact that he *wanted* to lift the entire car, and *intended* to remove the whole door kicked into his power somehow, so that it was able to override structural laws in favor of what Kenny believed he could do. Maybe if Kenny knew what you do, he couldn't have done it. There's a lot that's unknown about the Star Brand, but the theories about its power coming in from other readers seem endless . . .

Dear Jim Shooter,

Of all the writers on the Marvel staff, I feel that you are the best suited to write STAR BRAND. So far the stories are flawless (though I've only read the first 5 issues at this point).

Even though Ken is indestructable, the story has continued to be extremely interesting. You have taken a step forward from all the other masses of writers and proven that this can be done; a character does not have to have a million weaknesses and depend on luck and other super-beings to survive.

But it does seem too good to be true so I had to write. The Star Brand is said to be "a weapon in the universe more powerful than all others." Indeed, it has proven itself to be capable of leveling a planet. For the possessor to truly be a threatening force in universal affairs, though, it must grant the following properties:

1. Immunity to most psionic powers, for if it does not, some mental juggernaut could come and take it away from Ken. The Star Brand could become a contest for beings with great mental powers.

2. Immunity to most magical powers. As with mental powers, the Star Brand could become a contest for magicians.

3. Immunity to disease. What's to stop an enemy from inflicting the possessor with a lethal germ and waiting for him to turn off the power and die?

4. Immunity to benign alterations. The possessor could then not be shrunken down in size unless the power is off. Similarly, no other powers could be bestowed upon the possessor's body, for these would be eradicated by the Star Brand's energy the same way diseases are.

5. Consistency of power. The Star Brand should remain just as powerful in all parts of the universe.

Some other questions to ponder are: Does the Brand give everyone the same powers, or are they shaped by the possessor's personality? What happens to the Brand if the possessor is killed? Is there more than one Brand in the universe? If so, are they different?

Probably you have considered these questions, Jim. The stories all seem very well thought out. I truly hope you stay with the comic for at least a hundred issues.

Mike Griffin
Village on the Green
Boone, NC 28607

You said a mouthful there, Mike, and brought up a lot of interesting points. It's important to remember a few things first though. Kenny was *told* that the Star Brand is a powerful weapon, but not that it is all-powerful. The Brand may have certain limitations which have yet to be revealed. As for your other points: It has been implied that the Star Brand cannot be taken away by force, but only freely given by the possessor. The existence of psionic or magical beings, beyond paranormalcy, has not been established any more in the New Universe than in our own. And, as the 'old man' revealed in issue #6, if Ken should die before passing on the Star Brand . . . well, let's just say it wouldn't be a good thing. Of course, he may have been lying. As for your other ideas, only time and turmoil will tell, Mike. Keep reading.

Dear Messrs. Higgins, Shooter, and Romita,

Issue after issue, I continue to be amazed and impressed by STAR BRAND. I expected artificiality from all the New Universe titles, but this is the most sincere and emotionally genuine comic I've seen in a long time. The character of Ken Connell is superbly realized, making me think Jim must have reached into his own heart for a lot of the writing. His gradual evolution into heroism is as compelling and convincing as the mystery of the Star Brand is reminiscent of the first great years of the Silver Age Green Lantern.

This is what heroes should be, but haven't been for a long time. You've got this jaded, aging comic book reader feeling younger than he has for years. I'm hooked.

Gerard Jones
360 Guerrero St. #414
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Sirs,

Congratulations on a fine comic book. Since the personnel changes in DAREDEVIL, STAR BRAND is one of the finest titles Marvel has to offer.

The story has a strong cast of supporting characters to keep things interesting, and the situations are well-conceived (when is Ken going to get it together and go after Duck?). The plot development has been somewhat random and sketchy through the first three issues, but there is definitely a strong sense of impending conflict.

One complaint—Ken should have some male friends his age to bum around with. It gets boring watching him juggle Barb and Duck, and Myron is . . . Myron. There should be many interesting possibilities you could look into.

Sincerely,
Eric Ehlers
416 Dickinson C.
Newark, DE 19717

There are a lot of people it seems with very definite ideas about Ken's love life, Eric, most of them favoring Debbie the Duck. Do you know something Ken doesn't?

Dear STAR BRAND;

Wow! STAR BRAND is one great title. I've been buying comics for just about 10 years now, and STAR BRAND is one of the best I've seen. Jim Shooter has done an excellent job of plots and sub-plots in the 4 issues thus far. I think Ken and Debbie make a good couple, although I wish they'd quit saying "quack" every time they meet. Barb is just not right for Ken.

Steve Smith
Box 222
Rosalie, NE 68055

Dear Dudes,

I am going to get straight to the point. In issue #5 of STAR BRAND, what you did to Duck almost had me crying with her, and if you have her commit suicide or something, I will show you the real meaning of pain! She is perfect for Kenny. Barb has kids. She is seeing other people. Duck is awesome and faithful and if you kill her off I won't stand for it! Don't throw away the Duck!

Shonn Mills
Tallahassee, FL 32308

Dear Marvel Madhouse,

About STAR BRAND—all of the characters are great! Debbie the Duck is the best, with her great personality, kind heart and gentle word to everyone. Ken, on the other hand, is the worst for taking advantage of her, being so cheap, and acting, at times, like a jerk! I think Ken should dump Barb as quickly as possible, and start going out with good old Debbie.

Also, if you don't print this letter my theory will be proven that you never print letters from Canadians.

Danny Norbona
130 Bellamy Rd. N. Apt. #203
Scarbrough, ONTARIO, CANADA

Another theory bites the dust, eh, Danny? Seriously though, that's 4 votes for the Duck, one against Barb, and one against Ken. But life is tough in the big city . . . and in Pittsburgh, too! It's always easy to see the solution to a problem clearly when it's not you who has the problem. At this point it looks as though the decision may have been taken out of Ken's hands, though.

What happens next? Guess you'll just have to keep on reading each and every exciting installment in the saga of Star Brand to find out.

That's it for now. See you next time.